

GD HÔTEL BELLA TOLA & ST-LUC

HISTORY



swiss
historic
hotels

PREPARED BY

ANNE-FRANCOISE AND CLAUDE BUCHS-FAVRE

GD HÔTEL ET PENSION BELLA TOLA



1859, THE FIRST TOURISTS



Salle à manger Speisesaal Dining-Room

In 1860 (1) at the request of the parish priest, who until then had been providing accommodation to the first tourists, Pierre Pont (1831 - 1912) husband of Elisabeth Zufferey (1831 - 1910) mountain farmer (St-Luc), winegrower (Muraz), early mountain guide, natural therapist (healer), then president of the commune and deputy of the Grand Council, after an internship at the Hotel des Alpes in Leukerbad, opened the first Hotel Bella Tola in his large stone family house, built in 1859 after the second village fire of 1857, east of the church. Postal and in 1878 telegraph concessionaire. Propagated by mountain lovers (e.g. in July 1866 country banquet of the Geneva section of the Swiss Alpine Club below the summit of the Bella Tola at the invitation of Ernest Griolet).

THE PRESENT HOTEL BELLA TOLA

Around 1884 (2 and 3), at the suggestion of an owner of a boarding school in Lausanne, Pierre Pont undertook the construction of the "Grand Hotel Bella Tola" in the north of the village where various civilisations were discovered (archaeological finds: cup-shaped stone and several tombs from the 6th century BC, Bronze Age, Roman vase containing various Roman coins from 69 and 192 AD, objects deposited in the Swiss National Museum in Zurich (4).

The building consisted of 4 floors with mansards, 7 rows of horizontal windows and 40 beds (5). In 1884 the Colonial & Continental Church Society erected a chapel in the Hotel Bella Tola, which until 1925 held an Anglican church service in July and August (3).

Around 1892 (2) construction of an annex to the south wing of the building with 5 floors and 4 rows of horizontal windows (5) with a capacity of 40 additional beds, a bathroom, in addition to transportable bathtubs, 6 upstairs toilets, dining room for 100 people with tables for 12 to 16 people, a large and a small living room, a smoking room with billiards, a living room for guides and commissionaires. Until 1900 oil and candle lighting.



GRAND NOUVEL HOTEL BELLA TOLA

"First-class house with all modern conveniences, built in a beautiful position outside the village, close to the forest and in a sheltered resort - Varied excursion centre - Post and telegraph office at the hotel (5). For dinner big toilet with menu of 7 courses. Fresh food of own production. Renunciation of the expansion project to the north following the opening of the Hotel du Cervin. However, in 1897/99 (2) construction of the hotel in Chandolin. Complete fitting-out of the attics in the north wing of the building and construction of an outdoor veranda" (5).



ACCESS

At the beginning access to St-Luc on foot or by mule from Fang or Vissoie. In 1863 (6) arrival of the road to Vissoie (tunnels and galleries in the rock near the Pontis). In 1932 (7) road with postal car (in summer) to St-Luc.



FROM THE DOCUMENT PUBLISHED BY GABRIEL PONT GRAND HOTEL & PENSION BELLA TOLA

It should be noted that St-Luc was called LOUC, a Celtic word (forest). Then Louc became Luc. It is the hotelier of Bella Tola, Mr. Pierre Pont who, to distinguish Luc d'Anniviers from the other villages called Luc or Luques existing in Valais, baptized Luc "ST-LUC", name which was immediately admitted and officially received.

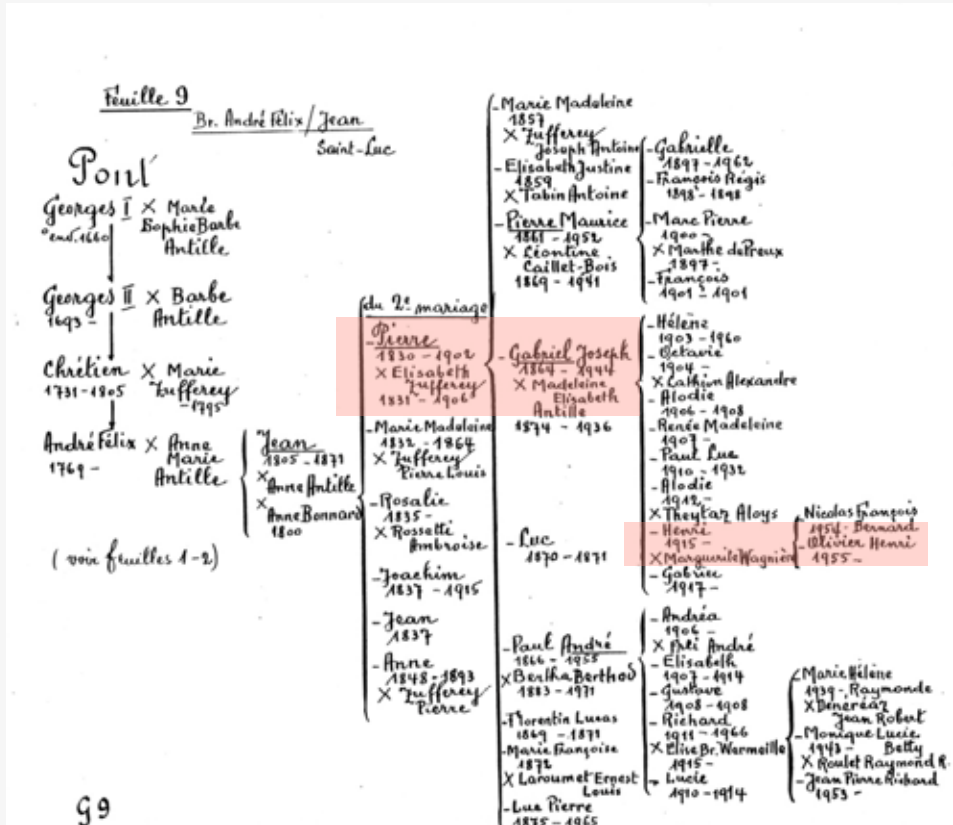
It is SIERRE station, of the Swiss Federal Railways network, which serves the Val d'Anniviers. A carriage road leads in three hours to Vissoie. From Vissoie, a mule track, zigzagging up the hill, leads to St-Luc in a little over an hour, while waiting for the train, the concession of which was granted on 22 December 1906 to the Société électrique du Val d'Anniviers.

The village was burnt down twice in the course of the last century, in 1845 and in 1858: its primitive appearance was significantly altered by the construction of beautiful white-faced houses grouped around the church.

In 1798 the village or commune had 441 inhabitants; 471 in 1829; 475 in 1870; 549 in 1888; 501 in 1910, divided into 120 households with 260 men and 241 women

THE FAMILY PONT

4 GENERATIONS



In 1896, Peter II became the owner of the hotel, but he took over the Hotel de Chandolin when it opened, while Gabriel Pont (1864 - 1944), husband of Madeleine Elisabeth Antille (1874 - 1936), later president of the commune, took over the present "Hotel Bella Tola et St-Luc" (5). Wine production in Muraz with gold medal in 1910 in Lausanne and at the national exhibition of 1914 (5). From 1920/30 running the hotel with his daughters Héléne, Octavie Lathion-Pont and Alodie Theytaz-Pont

THE FAMILY BUCHS

In 1995 taken over by Anne-Françoise and Claude Buchs, who with great commitment and taste, taking care of the interior and refurbishing the most beautiful dining room of a mountain hotel in the Valais, while emphasizing the historical aspect of the house, ensure that the hotel is run in the traditional style.

In 1944 taken over by Henri G. Pont (1915 - 1994), a graduate of the Hotel School of Lucerne and Lausanne, internships at the Gstaad Palace, Regina Wengen, Caux Palace, Gotthard Zurich among others, later president of the municipality, 1949: Marriage with Marguerite Wagnière (1923 - 1988). The financial situation was very difficult after an austere period without investments (1, World War, time of economic crisis, 2nd World War). Unsuccessful attempt to set up a company with shareholders (1944).

Operating on its own, it undertakes major renovations: hot and cold running water, bathrooms on each floor, later private baths and showers. Demolition of the typical mountain hotel verandah.

Reconstruction of the ground floor with a billiard room dating from 1884 in the entrance hall with new living room and restaurant.

In 1983, taken over by Olivier (1955) and Sulinda Pont (1952), it is the fourth generation. Completion of the renovation of the rooms with telephone, construction of the window verandah in front of the restaurant on the ground floor.



THE MAIN STAGES

- 1964** Installation of central heating
 - 1965** Bathrooms in rooms nr. 204-304 and 404
 - 1967** Installation of the lift
 - 1968** Modification of the hotel entrance and creation of a ski room to the left of the entrance
 - 1978** Renovation of the roof
 - 1980** Refurbishment of the restaurant "Le Tzambon" with installation of a grill
 - 1981** Project to extend the hotel with the construction of a swimming pool, a veranda in front of the restaurant and 4 buildings on the Achelli site
 - 1988** Construction of a veranda in front of the restaurant
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- 2001** ICOMOS Historic Hotel Award 2001
 - 2004** Demolition of the restaurant veranda and construction of a wooden veranda on the ground floor inspired by the original veranda. Extension of the building to the west to create a wellness area with an indoor swimming pool, sauna, steam bath and massage rooms, as well as a library lounge.
 - 2004** Founding member of the Swiss Historic Hotels
 - 2007** Purchase of the chalet next to the hotel, "The old Post Office" offering two new alpine residences with hotel services and a boutique
 - 2008** Opening of the boutique "Maison d'Angélique-Atelier d'ambiances" offering most of the hotel's decorative items



- 2009** New residence in an historical chalet in the centre of the village "Le Chamois" with an alpine decor and very popular with families.
- 2010** Renovation of 4 double rooms in historic style, free standing bath, original wallpapers
- 2011** Complete renovation of the 4th floor: ceiling insulation, new south-facing windows with lattice work as in the past, wallpaper in the bedrooms and corridors with frescoes. Removal of a bedroom to create a junior suite
- 2012** Renovation of 4 bedrooms on the 3rd floor based on the 4th floor model
- 2014** Complete transformation of the heating system and installation of two pellet-fired boilers, some of the wood for which comes from the Val d'Anniviers.
- 2016** Renovation of 6 north and south bedrooms in the west wing (insulation, removal of rendering and new wallpaper)
- 2017** 2017 Swiss Heritage Valais Section prize for historic hotels
- 2018** In autumn, renovation of two north-facing bedrooms with extension to the bathroom (insulation, new wallpaper, new flooring and new windows)
- 2018** In autumn, renovation of the entire stairwell with removal of rendering, smoothing and painting of walls
- 2019** In spring, renovation of the "Superior" bedroom on the 3rd floor with insulation, extension of the bathroom, new wallpaper and replacement of the windows on the 3rd floor of the East building.
In autumn, the ground floor living room, entrance hall and corridor were renovated and repainted.
- 2020** Classification of the Hotel Bella Tola as a historic monument of cantonal importance and its protection

"The Hotel Bella Tola has been inventoried as an object representative of the Bella Epoque and the history of the hotel industry in connection with the golden age of mountaineering in the Valais. It should therefore be classified as an object of cantonal importance. the Hôtel Bella Tola, built at the instigation of Pierre Pont and extended around 1892 by an annex designed by the Vevey architect Louis Maillard, retains intact its rich interior and exterior substance and structure as mentioned in the inventory sheet."



- 2020** Restoration of the dining room ceiling in 3 stages by Flavia Flückiger and Kathrin Harsch with the support of the State of Valais, the Commune of Anniviers and the Friends of Swiss Historic Hotels
In spring, renovation of the garden, removal of the cedar hedge, installation of a pergola, and a new wooden terrace for winter use. In autumn, renovation of the parquet flooring in the dining room
Transformation of the library on the ground floor into a restaurant with installation of a bench
- 2021** Rénovation complète des chambres 305 et 306 en junior suite, 309 et 316 en junior suite nord et de la chambre 307, isolation thermique et phonique, salles de bain, nouvelles portes
Fin du remplacement de toutes les fenêtres du 3ème étage
Rénovation du SPA, nouvelles couleurs, papiers peints panoramiques historiques à la piscine et utilisation de pigments naturels
- 2023** Complete renovation of rooms 206 and 207, thermal and sound insulation, bathrooms. Replacement of all bedroom doors and windows on the 2nd floor

(1) 1st entry in the foreigners' register

(2) Industrial tax register. Archives of the State of Valais in Sion: until 1885: 10-50 Fr. per year, 1885: 80Fr. 1886: 100 Fr., 1887: 130 Fr., 1888: 100Fr. and 1893: 200 Fr. In 1896, Pierre Pont de Pierre appears as a taxpayer instead of the founder Pierre de Jean. In 1899 Pierre Pont II was listed under Chandolin.

(3) Chaplains Book of the Chaplaincy of St-Luc from the Colonial & Continental Church Society, London: Opening July 6, 1884. 1899: "...Church more needed here than in Chandolin....". 1901: "Growing popularity of Chandolin".

(4) Erasme Zufferey, *Le Passé du Val d'Anniviers*, Annemasse 1927

(5) Photos, labels and prospectus.

(6) "Anniviers" *Les chemins de l'année 1956*, Imprimerie E. et W. Schoechli, Sierre, p.26

(7) "Anniviers" = note 6, p.56

Other sources: writings by Henri G. Pont and Olivier Pont as well as personal knowledge.

Copyright Swiss Hotel and Tourism Museum, Zurich - Mr and Mrs Prof. Dr. Beat and Dorothee Kleiner, regular guests of the hotel.

Thanks to Mr. Dr. Roland Flückiger-Seiler, expert on Swiss historic hotels and author of various books and publications on the subject (www.historischehotels.ch).

HIGH ALTITUDE HOTELS IN VAL D'ANNIVIERS



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DISCOVERING THE ALPS

At the beginning of the 18th century the "Grand Tour" tradition started to take root, especially in England. Young noblemen, usually accompanied by a mentor, were sent to the continent for a few weeks of formative travel to immerse themselves in the customs and culture of the countries they journeyed through. The route they took from Paris, the first compulsory stage, to Italy, the ultimate goal of the journey, obviously passed through the Alps. This "tour" prompted a vast social movement to which it gave its name, "tourism".



In parallel with these cultural journeys, contemporary scientists were taking an interest in "ice houses", the focus of several scientific expeditions from the middle of the 18th century onwards. The ascent of Mont Blanc in 1786 marked an important step in the conquest and knowledge of the Alpine peaks. The Chamonix valley quickly became a major tourist destination. The Bernese Oberland and the Valais also became Alpine hot spots very soon afterwards. The ascents of the Jungfrau in 1811 and the Finsteraarhorn the following year established a long list of firsts, culminating in the dramatic conquest of the Matterhorn in 1865. This rush to the Alps attracted a large number of mountain enthusiasts, mostly British, who spent several weeks in the region each summer climbing the surrounding peaks. Taking up residence in the Alpine region, they would hire guides for the duration of their stay. This mountaineering craze drove the creation of hotels in isolated valleys, as well as the development of the mountain guide profession.

THE ARRIVAL OF TOURISM IN VAL D'ANNIVIERS

During this frenetic period in the middle of the 19th century, the Baedeker guidebook recommended a much more pleasant route between Sion and Zermatt through the passes and mountains instead of along the monotonous route through the dusty Rhone Valley. In its 1862 edition, this famous guide reads: "The dusty cantonal road in the broad Rhone Valley, often marshy and shrouded in the shadow of the mountains, is not a particularly refreshing walk for the traveller." As an alternative to this monotonous route in the main valley of the Valais, Baedeker suggested a high-altitude route between Sion and the tourist resort of Zermatt. From the cantonal capital, one could go to Evolène, then to Saint-Luc in the Val d'Anniviers via the Col de Torrent. The route continued via Gruben in the Tourtemagne valley, via the Pas de Bœuf and then, passing the foot of the Zehntenhorn, via Saint-Nicolas in the valley of the same name, to end at the Riffelberg hotel above Zermatt



This rather strenuous walk, which, according to the Baedeker, could not be done "without a mountain guide for crossing the passes", obviously required accommodation at the corresponding stages. This is why the Hotel de la Dent Blanche in Evolène was opened in 1858, the Bella-Tola in Saint-Luc in 1860, and the Weisshorn in the Tourtemagne valley the following year.

Finally, the Hotel Saint-Nicolas was built in 1863 in the village of the same name. The opening of these first establishments marked the beginning of hotel construction in the still little-visited side valleys on the left bank of the Rhône, twenty to thirty years after the start of the tourist boom in the other mountains of the Valais.



THE FIRST 'BASE CAMPS' FOR TOURISTS

The Val d'Anniviers is already referred to in the second edition of the Baedeker guide in 1848. Five years later, the guidebook mentions the first possibility of accommodation, suggesting lodging with the parish priest in Vissoie. In the 1860s, thanks to the new road from the central valley floor to Sierre, Val d'Anniviers became a well-known travel destination. Its vast array of peaks was beginning to attract experienced mountaineers, and its mountains guaranteed splendid views for less experienced tourists.

Two events really opened up the field: In 1858 or 1859, Baptiste and Julienne Epiney-Antille opened the Pension Durand in a chalet in Zinal, which, according to a descendant, had already been used to house the first tourists in 1790. At the same time, Pierre and Elisabeth Pont-Zufferey began to build the new Hotel Bella-Tola in the centre of the village of Saint-Luc, which had been devastated by a terrible fire on 2 July 1858. Shortly after the inauguration of the new road from Vissoie to the Rhone Valley in 1863, a new hotel building replaced the first Durand guesthouse in Zinal.

These first tourist establishments in the region are part of a group of hotels in the Valais that stand at the foot of the mountains and, first and foremost, serve as base camps for climbing the high Alpine peaks. Just like the Durand and the Bella-Tola, the names of these first hotels often referred to a nearby mountain. In terms of their architecture, they were generally stone buildings with a four-sided roof. These new buildings were clearly in a very different style to the traditional wooden Valais houses.

WHEN THE INNKEEPER BECAME A MAÎTRE D'HÔTEL

The tax register for industry in the Canton of Valais shows that business was bad for Pierre Pont, innkeeper, in St-Luc in the 1860s, for example in 1865: "...as he was granted last year a sideration of his little trade", and in 1868 the entry reads: "very little trade". Hotel construction in the region only reached its peak in a second development phase towards the end of the century. These developments started in July 1876, when the canton's newspapers announced the inauguration of the new hotel in Vissoie, built at the initiative of a Society of shareholders.



THE TOURIST AWAKENING OF THE VAL D'ANNIVIERS

Pierre Pont chose the day of the Fête Nationale in 1882 for the laying of the foundation stone for his new Bella-Tola hotel, outside the village of Saint-Luc this time. It was the first hotel in Val d'Anniviers to benefit from a breathtaking view. At the same time, François Masoni built the Hotel Weisshorn away from any other buildings, some 500 metres above Saint-Luc. It was rebuilt after a fire in September 1889. In the 1880s, the Durand Hotel in Zinal was extended by a considerable five-axis annex upstream. The 1890s were euphoric years for hotel developments. The Grand Hôtel du Cervin in Saint-Luc, the Diablons and Besso hotels in Zinal, and the Grand Hôtel (originally named Bella Vista) in Chandolin opened almost simultaneously between 1893 and 1896. The list ends with the construction of the Hotel des Becs de Bosson in Grimentz before the end of the century.

A little ahead of this latest wave of hotel construction, Joanne's French guidebook refers to a "considerable extension in 1889" of the Grand Hôtel de la Bella Tola in St-Luc. The architect Louis Maillard from Vevey, who was at that time putting the finishing touches to the new Grand Hotel in Territet on Lake Geneva, was often on holiday in the region and became a friend of the house. It was Pierre Pont who commissioned him to build this new wing to the south of his existing establishment; and seven years later, he drew up the plans for the wonderful new Grand Hotel in Chandolin. The vast tourist boom at the end of the 19th century also took place in the Valais. Most tourists, usually from the British Empire, stayed in the mountains during the summer seasons.

The high-altitude hotels that appeared in the Valais at this time were often built over an altitude of 1500 metres in locations with prestigious panoramic views, and offered luxurious comfort comparable to that of similar establishments built on outstanding sites near the great Swiss lakes. It was at this time that the simple innkeeper in the high altitude resorts of the Valais became a maître d'hôtel. In the many richly decorated halls and rooms, the company breathed the air of these castles, they sat on the sunny terraces to admire the incomparable views. Between lunch and dinner, the guests enthusiastically raised their telescopes to observe those ascending the three and four thousand metre peaks, which they themselves were climbing less and less. The names given to the hotels reflect this change in behaviour: they were no longer named after the nearby mountains, but instead were called Belvedere (e.g. in Gletsch and Gornergrat), Bellevue (in Saas Fee and Zermatt), Beau-Site (in Saas Fee) or Bella Vista (in Chandolin). Towards the end of the 19th century, the important role of tourism in Val d'Anniviers was reflected in the plans for rail links. In 1899, under the leadership of the hotelier Tabin, an initiative committee submitted a request for a concession for a narrow-gauge railway linking Sierre to Zinal, via Vissoie, and for a funicular between Vissoie and Saint-Luc. In 1901, a committee made up of the engineer G. Dietrich from Eclépens and architects Gay from Montreux and Sion received a concession for an extension to the railway from Zinal to Zermatt with a tunnel planned at an altitude of 2800 metres. From 1904, the Val d'Anniviers electricity company worked on these various projects. In the end, none of these ambitious undertakings were realised and the appearance of the valley changed very little at that time.